

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION TRANSPORTATION 2035

GENERAL FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED FROM RANDOM PHONE POLL

MAY 14, 2008

ALAMEDA COUNTY: CITY OF OAKLAND

Planning for future transportation needs: When asked to describe the current condition of the existing system of roads, the participants all reported that maintenance is needed. Overall, 8 of the 11 participants had taken public transit in the last month and 2 participants ride public transit on a weekly basis. These participants indicated that maintenance is also needed in transit stations, buses, and onboard BART. When asked to choose a priority for the future, the participants were roughly split between prioritizing the maintenance of existing systems and the construction and addition of new systems in their community. To explain their choices, the participants cited similar factors as several of the other focus groups. Some of the participants argued that maintenance should be a priority for safety reasons and to preserve existing assets. Two of the participants also suggested that there is not sufficient land to build new roads, so maintenance is the only alternative. In response, the participants who prioritized new systems mentioned that alternatives to driving are needed, and the current habit of driving alone cannot be sustained with current gas prices, population growth, and climate change.

Maintain the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	6
Build new roads and add more bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	5

Interestingly, there was greater consensus in the participants' allocation of the \$30 billion dollar budget. Although 1 participant would spend up to 75 percent on maintenance, 9 of the participants indicated that they would spend up to 50 percent or less. The remaining participant was undecided.

up to 25% (\$7.5 billion dollars)	1
up to 50% (\$15 billion dollars)	8
up to 75% (\$22.5 billion dollars)	1
100% (\$30 billion dollars)	0
DK/NA	1

With the funds that remain from the \$30 billion dollar budget, the participants reported that they would invest in the following: extending hours of operation (3) and coverage of BART (7); expanding other public transit systems (6); programs to reduce public transit fares (1); encouraging alternatives to driving, such as biking (2); and building new roads (1)

Congestion relief: Here as well, a majority of the participants indicated that traffic congestion in the future would be either “Somewhat worse” (3) or “Much worse” (5) if funds are only spent to maintain existing systems.

Much better	0
Somewhat better	1
No change	2
Somewhat worse	3
Much worse	5

In plans to relieve traffic congestion, 3 participants prioritized investments in highway systems, 7 prioritized investments in public transit options, and 1 participant was undecided. Although a few participants suggested that funding for highway systems is needed to meet current and future demand, a majority of the participants argued that the solution to transportation problems lies in more comprehensive and efficient public transit options. The group reported that the following changes and improvements are needed to the region’s public transit systems: greater evening and weekend BART schedules; more connections from public transit stations to destinations, including shuttles and buses; improved pedestrian corridors and bike paths to provide access to transit stations; improved reliability of public transit schedule; reducing the stigma of public transit use; and emphasizing the needs of the aging population in public transit plans.

Highway systems to relieve traffic congestion, including ramp metering, high-occupancy toll lanes, etc.	3
Public transit options, including rail and buses to provide alternatives to driving.	7
Walking paths and bicycle lanes to provide alternatives to driving	0
DK/NA	1

Shown in the table below are the programs that the participants thought would be most effective in reducing truck volumes along freight corridors. Some of the participants indicated more than one option, so the responses total to more than 11.

Keep trucks out of the peak commuter hours	5
Allow smaller trucks to use carpool lanes during congested periods for a fee	2
Encourage more cargo deliveries be made by rail or ferries	3
Build exclusive truck lanes supported by trucking fees	1
Provide more truck parking in commercial business areas	4

DK/NA	2
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Attitudes toward focused growth: The Alameda County focus group showed the most consensus regarding focused growth. Overall, 10 of the 11 participants indicated that it should be a higher priority to provide more transportation funds to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines. The remaining participant was concerned that this system would disadvantage other communities, but agreed that transportation systems should be an important part of housing development considerations.

Funds to communities that are planning to build more housing along BART and other public transit lines	10
Funds evenly to communities regardless of where they are planning to build homes	1

Providing transit access: The Alameda County focus group overwhelmingly supported discounted transit fares based on household income. Otherwise, several participants suggested that fares should be decreased for all residents to encourage the use of public transit. In particular, it was suggested that transit fares should be less expensive than the cost of gasoline to drive alone, and that this pricing would encourage ridership. Contrary to several of the other focus groups, the Alameda County participants argued that the current fares are a barrier to residents' use. Finally, the group argued that the resulting increase in ridership may pay for the fare reduction.

Emissions reduction: The importance of creating alternatives to driving was further revealed in the discussion on emissions reduction – 10 of the 11 participants indicated that reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving should take priority. Further, the discussion mainly centered on alternatives to driving, with just a brief mention of reducing emissions caused by larger trucks.

Reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, such as public transit, bicycling, walking, etc.	10
Reducing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow to make it easier to drive around the Bay area	0
DK/NA	1

The participants suggested a variety of transportation programs to reduce automobile emissions, including: additional parking near transit stations to encourage commuter ridership, car and bike share programs for travel from transit stations to destinations, education programs to encourage residents to use alternative transportation, bike lanes and pedestrian walkways, and incentives for carpool use. Additionally, several participants suggested that all public transportation should rely on clean-burning fuels.

Final thoughts on maintenance versus expansion projects: Following the discussion, two of the participants indicated that they would spend less on maintenance than they did at the beginning of the session. Although the group emphasized the importance of increasing public transit systems, they once again discussed the need for basic maintenance. One participant

commented, “We must maintain our current systems, or we are simply throwing away our initial investments.” A majority of the participants agreed with this comment, but then several mentioned the need for alternatives to driving and to plan progressively.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	3
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	6
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	1
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0
DK/NA	1

In addition to maintenance of existing systems, the participants also prioritized the following: increasing public transit systems (6) and reducing or discounting fares (7); programs to relieve traffic congestion (1) and reduce automobile emissions (2); and providing incentives for focused growth (1).

Considering revenue measures to fund additional transportation projects, the participants were divided on whether additional toll roads are the answer. The discussion then focused on the current use of transportation funds and taxes, and the need for more citizen oversight and controls.